

CHRIST AND THE LEPER

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Matthew 8:1-4 records one of Christ's miracles, the healing of a leper in Galilee. The passage says that "*when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*" There are important lessons to learn from the two commandments that the Lord gave to the leper after he healed him.

The command to tell no one

In Matthew 8:4, immediately after healing the leper, Jesus told him, "See thou tell no man." Why would Jesus tell someone not to publicize a miracle that had been performed? Jesus had a very good purpose for charging the leper not to tell anyone what Jesus had done. Up to this point, Jesus had done several miracles in Galilee. First, he had turned the water to wine at the marriage feast in Cana (John 2:1-11). Next, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the passover and did miracles there (John 2:23). Many Galileans who had traveled to Jerusalem for the passover saw all the things that Jesus did there (John 4:45). Jesus then returned to Cana and healed a man's son who was sick in Capernaum (John 4:46-53), which was the second miracle that he performed in Galilee (John 4:54). Next, he cast out a devil in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-27), and "immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee" (Mark 1:28). At sunset, "all the city" gathered at the door of Simon and Andrew's house (Mark 1:29-33), and Jesus "healed many that were sick" and "cast out many devils" (Mark 1:34). The next morning, "all men" were seeking for Jesus (Mark 1:35-37). Jesus then "went about all Galilee" teaching and preaching and "healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matt 4:23). The cumulative effect of all of this was that "his fame went throughout all Syria" (Matt 4:24) and

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“there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan” (Matt 4:25). People were now mobbing Jesus wherever he went and any further attraction of numbers risked compromising his ability to move about freely to teach and preach as he desired. Therefore, in Matthew 8:4, Jesus charged the leper not to tell anyone about his miraculous healing. The fact that this was the Lord’s purpose for telling the leper to keep quiet is underscored by what happened when the leper, rather than keeping silent, published the matter much and blazed it abroad (Mark 1:45). After the news of the miraculous healing of the leper spread, Jesus could no longer openly enter into Capernaum. The Lord’s movements were now severely restricted, and he now had to reside in desert places. Still, the people came to him “from every quarter” (Mark 1:45).

The command to go to the priest

The second command that Jesus gave to the leper was to “go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them” (Matt 8:4). Christ’s purpose for instructing the leper to go to the priest was to obey God’s commands. Whatever Jesus did, he was always in complete submission to the Father and always obedient to his word (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 7:14; 8:28-29; Php 2:5-8; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22). In the Law of Moses, God gave very detailed and explicit commandments for dealing with leprosy (Lev 13), as well as “the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing” (Lev 14). This law was still in effect while Christ was on the earth (Matt 5:17-19; 19:16-19; 23:23; Mark 10:17-19; Luke 11:42; 16:17; 18:18-20). God through Moses clearly stated: “*Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do*” (Deut 24:8). Since Jesus cleansed the leper in Matthew 8:1-3, it was now necessary for the leper to go to the priest to fulfill the law. That is why Jesus commanded him to do as Moses commanded (see also Mark 1:40-45; Luke 17:12-14).